DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 396 CE 052 339

AUTHOR Martin, Rachel, Ed.; Eddy, David, Ed.
TITLE Focus on Basics: Innovative Teaching Practices for Adults. Volume 2, Number 2.
INSTITUTION World Education, Inc., Boston, MA.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 13p.
AVAILABLE FROM World Education, Inc. 210 Lincoln Street, Boston, MA 02111.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT Focus on Basics; v2 n2 Spr 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Basic Skills; Educational Innovation; *Literacy Education; Participative Decision Making; *Student Developed Materials; Student Publications; Teaching Methods; *Writing for Publication
IDENTIFIERS *Participatory Research

ABSTRACT

This issue begins with "Listen to a New Word: Publishing from the Grassroots" (Rachel Martin) about a movement to publish the writings of adult literacy participants. The article looks at what these writings have to say about the world and why the world needs to listen. "Effective Practice: Panning for Gold" (Zona Johnson, Sharon Cox) discusses how and why the authors teach writing and point out why everyone needs a "literature of poor folks." "Research within Reach: Participatory Action Research and the Literacy Classroom" (Marilyn Gillispie) discusses a search for a framework to help participants in the classroom move from self-reflection in their writing to analysis and action. Other contents of this issue are excerpts from magazines and literacy publications that print the work of working-class writers, and information on the ways that literacy publishing projects are funding and distributing their materials. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED306396

Focus on Basics

World Education • *Innovative teaching practices for adults* • Volume 2, Number 2 • Spring 1989

Inside this Issue

—1—

Listen to a New Word: Publishing from the Grassroots

There's a movement growing to publish the writings of adult literacy participants. Rachel Martin looks at what these writings have to say about the world and why the world needs to listen.

—5—

Effective Practice

Writers Zona Johnson and Sharon (Howell) Cox talk about how and why they teach writing in an interview with *Focus on Basics*. Their answers show why all of us need a "literature of poor folks".

—8—

Research Within Reach

Marilyn Gillispie discusses her search for a framework to help participants in her classes move from self-reflection in their writing to analysis and action.

—10—

Materials That Matter

Excerpts from magazines and literacy publications that print the work of working-class writers.

—12—

Blackboard

Information on the ways literacy publishing projects are funding and distributing their materials.

CAS23396

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Listen to a New Word: Publishing from the Grassroots

"The questions of who is to speak, who is to be listened to, and what kinds of voices and ways of writing are to be valued are always questions of political power."

David Morley and Ken Warpole
The Republic of Letters

Remembering life in a sharecropping family, burying your books in the ground to hide them from the landlord who tried to take them away; retelling stories of cleaning other people's homes for thirty years and your small acts of resistance, like never once stooping on hands and knees to scrub a floor; proclaiming your dream of a housing complex with luxurious laundromats and gourmet, but economical, delicatessans not just for the bosses, but for the secretaries like yourself.

Participants in literacy programs and community writing centers are writing down their memories, strategies and dreams in North America and England. A movement is growing to publish their words. Many literacy programs already compile student writings into booklets or magazines for in-house distribution. A new view of publication goes a step beyond. It says these writings demand a wider audience.

continued on page 2

Focus on
Basics

Innovative teaching practices for adults.

FOCUS ON BASICS is a resource bulletin providing adult educators with information on innovative and effective teaching practices currently used in basic skills programs throughout the country. *FOCUS ON BASICS* is published by **World Education**, a non-profit organization with over 35 years of experience working with adults in disadvantaged communities both in this country and overseas. **World Education** is dedicated to promoting approaches that involve learners in their own education and assist teachers with the development of low-cost, locally-specific materials.

FOCUS ON BASICS is published three times a year. Annual subscriptions are available for ten dollars. Contributions are welcome. All subscription and editorial correspondence should be sent to the address below.

FOCUS ON BASICS
World Education
210 Lincoln St.
Boston, MA 02111
(617) 482-9485

Editors: Rachel Martin/David Eddy
Editorial Advisor: Stuart Gedal
Design: The Laughing Bear Associates, Inc., Montpelier, Vermont

Cover illustration: Sarah-Lee Terrat

Copyright © 1989 World Education, Inc.
ISSN: 0899-188

Listen to a New Word
Publishing from the Grassroots

continued from page 1

A New Body of Knowledge

Adult literacy participants are often describing realities and cultures that get distorted when described — as they most often are — by people who live outside of them, writing with what David Morley and Ken Warpole, authors of *The Republic of Letters: Writing, Culture, Publishing and Politics*, have called, "the tourist approach to poverty and working class life". In newspaper and magazine articles, the reality of single motherhood is distorted and reshaped into a mythical image when "female-headed household" becomes synonymous with the so-called breakdown of the family, the cause of teenage pregnancy and crime, or portrayed as broken and illegitimate. Toronto educators Elaine Gaber-Katz and Jenny Horseman have pointed out that for people who themselves live on the margins of what's considered mainstream middle-class life, it's "crazy-making" to never see your own life represented realistically in print. In an article in the Fall/Winter 1988 issue of *Canadian Woman Studies*, they ask, "What language describes the events in your life if you are a single mother on benefits who has a female partner/lover? Are you a housewife? Are you a working mother? How do you see/describe yourself compared with how others see/describe you? Where are you represented in your children's readers that depict 'family' life?"

Knowledge about the world as it is and as we want to change it to become is partly shaped by what's in print. Most often, the voices of poor and working class people *can't* be read. They're not being published. Yet the social position of the majority of the people with minimal literacy skills gives them a perspective on reality often hidden from those living more privileged lives. We need that perspective — and the dreams and strategies that come from it — in order to reflect accurately the wider body of knowledge that exists in the world.

In this issue of *Focus on Basics* we'll be looking at what people are publishing, how they're doing it, and why. Writers Zona Johnson and Sharon (Howell) Cox talk about why and how they teach people to write. Marilyn Gillispie discusses her search for a framework to help participants in her class move from self-reflection in writing to further analysis and action. My article is the result of listening to what the members of my own literacy classes are saying as they write and my subsequent search for examples of these kinds of writings in print.

A New Literature

> Subversive, sullen expression
> Neither drink nor drug induced
> Just an average individual,
> trying to tell the truth.
>
> *From the poem*
> Subanimal Yells
> *by Sharon Dunham*

Sharon Dunham is the author of *Subanimal Yells*, a poetry collection published by Centerprise, a community publishing project in England. She writes of one of the reasons to publish that's echoed by many community writers: "I hope (these poems) give encouragement to working-class writers who have been led to believe that the ability to write is a middle-class privilege. Go home and create something entirely new!"

This literature *is* new. As much as it's new in content, it's often new in form. As Morley and Warpole point out, "These books are full of direct address: 'let me tell you a story' and 'as I was saying'." But Morley and Warpole remind us that "direct doesn't mean naive". The

From* My Name is Rose *by Rose Doiron, Published by East End literacy, Toronto.
Photo: David Smiley

content is often incisive and missing from dominant forms of literature. The authors of *Listening Ears*, themselves literacy participants in England, write, "Usually books about education have been written by educationalists for professionals or students of education. Most people in this country are ex-school children and have views about how the education system could or should be organized. These thoughts are not often put into print. This book (...) is an attempt to start filling the gap." In talking about form, these same authors tell us, "When you read this book, you may be surprised at the way some of the writers write. Maybe you have the idea that language in books ought to obey some set of rules, and you find the use of words in our book not as formal as you think it should be. Some of the most exciting publications we know break all kinds of rules." There's a range of dialect and syntax among the published writings of adult literacy participants and community writers. Some conform to "Standard English"; some are written as the author speaks; others are finding their own new form.

Grassroots Publishing and Literacy

England has the longest tradition of publishing the work of community writers. The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers was formed in 1976. Members of the Federation say they use the term "worker writers" to "register the fact that the working class, the majority of the population, are still in Tillie Olsen's words, 'marginal to the culture'." Members of the Federation include adult literacy projects alongside other writing groups and local history workshops. Community publishing projects produce the literature, which ranges from poetry collections like Sharon Dunham's, to The Black Anthology Group's book of poetry and prose, to an anthology of women's birthing stories called *Every Birth It Comes Different*. Community bookshops distribute these works so that they can be read by the general public.

In the U.S., the publishing efforts in the literacy field are newer and distribution is still small. In Massachusetts, "Publishing for Literacy", a project of the Brookline Public Library and the Adult Literacy Resource Institute, and the collaborative effort of the Family Learning Center and the Boston Public Library are two such efforts. Distribution is aimed at "new readers" and geared to libraries and literacy programs although the possibilities exist for expansion to a wider audience.

In the States we can also look beyond the field of literacy to projects that can inspire us to re-examine the writings coming out of our classes and see them as a literature that should be available on any bookstore shelf. In words strikingly similar to Sharon Dunham's, novelist Meridel Le Sueur encouraged people in this country to write in the 1930s:

> Who knows the fires, emotions, love, the deep glow and courage of our people? The rich spiced talk of men at night riding over the dark prairie to look for a job; the talk of steelworkers and of women knitting socks for another war? More and more we need words to write the true history of the past so that we may create a true history in the future. (...) It is up to you to make this new literature, to use this tool that is in your hands.

In the 1980s, West End Press is reprinting LeSueur's words in their worker-writer series, and a magazine called *The Mill Hunk Herald* is documenting "the true history of the past". Laid-off steelworkers, homemakers, cooks, clerical workers, ambulance drivers—like many adult literacy students, most of the contributors to *The Mill Hunk Herald* never thought they'd be writers. For ten years, the Pittsburgh magazine with a national circulation has been publishing the poetry, prose, political humor and cartoons of working people. There are no advertisements; *The Mill Hunk Herald* is funded by subscriptions and by people who send in a piece of their unemployment check to keep it going. Its name was once a derogatory term applied to Eastern European immigrant steelworkers. Later, "mill hunk" became a badge of honor for people proud to work in steel. There are no editors, no bosses; according to the editorial collective, it's a magazine "controlled by rank-and-file readers and

writers" who are invited to open meetings where decisions are made about which pieces to include.

Nick Coles is one of the facilitators of "Steel City Stories", a public writing workshop sponsored by *The Mill Hunk Herald*. "This is a literature of people whose lives are dominated by work," says Coles. "It has a critical edge to it, a dissenting tone of voice." It fills a major gap by documenting the decline of the steel industry from the perspective of the people whose daily lives were intertwined with it.

Each year, a group of women in Cambridge, Massachusetts publish a magazine called *Hear My Soul's Voice*. They've given public readings in local high schools and at Harvard, and they produce an annual radio program for International Women's Day. The women are neighbors and members of writing groups organized by the Jefferson Park Writing Center, which is located in a public housing project. While not literacy students, many of the women's initial attitudes toward writing were not at all different from those we often hear from the participants in our classes. That attitude has changed. Writer Lisa Fay, in "A Tribute to the Jefferson Park Writing Center", reveals what writing and the writer's group have come to mean to the women at Jefferson Park:

> After 10 years
> with a homeless mind
> I am honeymoon happy
> to hang out
> my party heart
> to a dancing public

"My Grandmother's Stories Are My Own", "Knowing the Light Will Come", and "Nothing to Do But Write" are the latest volumes of *Mosaic*, a magazine of stories and photographs by students at South Boston High. They tell about desegregation and being the first in your family to go to college, about growing up bilingual, and about parenting and work. Writer Barbara Smith, one of the founders of Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, writes, "Despite its focus on high school and the years directly following, *Mosaic* talks about issues that concern me very much." Because of this, the *Mosaic* anthologies are used as texts at the University of Massachusetts and Roxbury Community College and have been sold at a bookstore in downtown Boston.

Grassroots publishing in this country doesn't only mean magazines. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, middle school students are writing books for children in the English-speaking communities of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. Books for Bluefields has published over twenty titles and sent more than four thousand books to Nicaragua. Among them are a Chicano student's fictionalized account of Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary hero portrayed as a bandit in the U.S.

Group Process vs. One-to-One

Group work is an essential characteristic of many of the programs that have been mentioned here. Morley and Warpole write that in England, "The workshop group (...) doesn't necessarily mean writing during group meetings (though it's not unknown). It does mean a commitment to using the group as the first readership for work, and as the body that decides about editing, shaping, public reading or publishing." I've seen in my own classes how people share some assumptions about the world that enable them to grant a particular kind of legitimacy to each other's ideas as they write. Many first time writers may be blocked more because they are asked to write outside of such a community than because of a lack of facility with spelling or punctuation.

Criteria for Publication

Because of what's lacking in the wider culture, the criteria used to select stories and poems for publication often take the form of questions like, "Is this a story that hasn't been told?", "Does it explode any common myths?" A woman's writing group at East End Literacy in Toronto decided to publish *My Name is Rose* because it spoke of a woman fighting back against physical abuse. Picked up by battered women's shelters in Toronto, it's the first of the student writings generated by East End Literacy to reach an audience beyond other literacy programs.

Like the "tourist approach" to working class life, which tends to portray it as singularly dismal when the writer's not romanticizing it, those who write about people with minimal literacy skills almost always portray them in such terms as "non-functional": poor parents, poor workers, helpless, dependent. When people write about their *own* lives, what is portrayed is both the ordinariness they possess *and* the extraordinariness with which many don't simply survive the problems of poverty, but thrive. *Mosaic* editor Katie Singer says of the magazine's contributors, "The photographs differ from most media images of Brighton, Dorchester, Roxbury and South Boston in their ordinariness. Their power comes from the students' ability to see what is special in their everyday lives." The authors of *The Republic of Letters* write, "(P)eople who have expressed reservations about 'books which just tell you how bad everything used to be and still is' are often surprised to find that realism can also be about inspiring feats of personal heroism in the face of dreadful handicaps. That it gives an account of much selflessness amongst many people in life, that it is often covering periods of great reflective happiness..." And the Black Anthology Group says of its volume, *Not All Roses*, "This book is not just about how hard it is to be 'Black and Living in London'. We write lovingly about family relationships, the true loves of our lives, mainly our mothers and children, and also the development of our people."

In my own classroom this fall, people are writing about doing battle with the health, housing and welfare systems that try to suck the life *out* of you, about the similarities between work on an assembly line and work taking care of other people's bodies and homes, about the differences in the strategies you use to survive in the South and in the North. There is knowledge here I don't have, and strategies and visions I can't create. Read the excerpts you find in this issue; write away for more. Most of all, listen to what your own students are saying. Then consider ways of letting the rest of the community or the world listen, too.

Rachel Martin
Editor, Focus On Basics

Epigraph from *The Republic of Letters: Writing, Culture, Publishing and Politics*, edited by Dave Morley and Ken Warpole. Comedia Publishing Group, 9 Poland Street, London W1 3DG England. 1982.

Sharon (Howell) Cox and Zona Johnson
Photos: Rachel Martin

Effective Practice: Panning For Gold

Zona Johnson and Sharon (Howell) Cox talked with *Focus on Basics* editor Rachel Martin about why they write and why and how they teach writing to others. In their answers are ideas about the role of talk and the importance of a group in the writing process, the role of native language in ESL writing, and the reasons why all of us need a "literature of poor folks".

Sharon and Zona are writers and teachers of writing. Sharon teaches at the Jefferson Park Writing Center in Cambridge and has been a member of the women's writing group there for six years. Her work has appeared in several volumes of the Center's magazine, *Hear My Soul's Voice*. Zona is a Community Teaching Assistant at the Jackson/Mann Community School in Boston and has published poetry in *Need I Say More*, the magazine of the Publishing for Literacy Project.

Focus: Why do you teach writing?

Sharon: Why do I do it? It's just so important that people give themselves time to reflect and think about what it is that's affecting them personally, socially, politically. Even if you're not going to be a writer. You can look back in a few years, especially with journal writing, at things you wrote and say "Gee, I outgrew this," or, "I forgot I saw that." You know, it's sort of a documentary that says you were here. And maybe it is something you pass onto your kids. And maybe it never gets published. But it's something concrete.

Zona: People need to write about their everyday experiences so other people can read it. It's like when I was in school. They were teaching me all white things but they weren't teaching me things that were black. So that was leading me to look up to white people instead of having somebody that I could look up to that was the color I was. It was like going and learning about somebody else's identity and not learning about your own.

Sharon: Not only should people learn about their own identities, they should also know how that identity shaped this country. Everytime a new immigrant population came in, they did something to the history of the country.

Focus: And publications like *Need I Say More*, with writings by Haitians and Latinos, are documenting that?

Zona: Yea. But when I went to school, there was no Black History and that's why I dropped out, I believe, because me and my teacher used to get into it all the time. We used to be reading about George Washington, Abraham Lincoln. I said, "Where's the black people? I know if we're here now, there had to be some then." And you know, this is considered as "being smart" Anyway, they had two people in there.

Sharon: George Washington Carver!

Zona: Oh please, and I told them I'm sick of peanuts! Then there's Booker T. Washington.

Sharon: Yea, he was another one. Good old Booker T.

Zona: I wanted to hear about people like Angela Davis, Huey Newton, Rap Brown.

Sharon: You don't even hear about them in Black History Month. They leave them out. Anybody who ever started any trouble does not make history books.

Zona: They act like when they brought slaves over here that nobody rebelled; everybody was happy being a slave.

You know, when people look at television and they see all the drugs in the community and the killing, a lot of people will probably say, "Oh, that's how blacks like to live —that's their environment. They made it that way." But no blacks have that kind of money to bring drugs into their neighborhood. It's the government and white people —I'm not talking about all white people — but it's about the government being underhanded. Who do they think is putting the drugs *in* the

black community? They just want to put drugs in there to keep black people asleep, take over Roxbury and move the white people in and displace blacks again.

Sharon: I have a poem I'm going to read tonight and it's called, "They Still Lynch Black Folks in America". But now when they lynch us, *we* pay for the lynching. "As young bodies hang from crystalline ropes of addiction", those are some of the words of this poem. So they don't need white sheets anymore. Burning crosses are passe. Night rides, no more. Clean hands.They still lynch black folks in America. But because we come from where we come from, we're not supposed to know this. We're not supposed to see it. Sounds bad, but that's the way it is.

Describing the Way It Is

Focus: Do you think the way it is, as *you* see it, is being described in literature or in the media?

Sharon: No. America is hip deep in somebody's blood. And I think that's not going to ever be said. And if I say that too loud and too many people start to listen, they'll shut me up at some point. So I'm frightened a lot of times. When I sit down with a piece of paper in my hand, a lot of things I really want to say, I don't say them. There's nothing but histories full of martyrs. And I'm not brave enough to be a martyr. But I can see, so I write what I think I can get away with. And nobody from the dominant culture is going to write the truth. They just don't.

You look at the media at night. It's like when they do welfare rights. There's thousands of people out there, they go zero in on some little woman who says, "I wants a Queen size waterbed!" That woman said something real important when she said she wanted a Queen size waterbed. She said I want to *live* like you. Do you know what I'm saying, but because she said "a Queen-size waterbed", now she becomes a subject of ha, ha, ha. They don't even get the point. The woman said I want what you have. I want to be included in this.

Zona: But they're looking at it as...

Sharon: She's on welfare and she wants a waterbed?

Zona: How *dare* she have a waterbed?

Focus: So it sounds like not only when people speak, are they saying something different from what the media says, but even when the media quotes their words, those words are given a different interpretation.

Zona: They twist it.

Sharon: Yea. Then there's so many things that are just outright lies. They try to pretend nowadays that lesbians and gays raising children is some kind of new idea. They been doing it for years. So now all of a sudden we're going to focus in on it, put the camera on it. All it's to do is to push another group outside the main group. Ways to separate us. There's too much lying and there's too much people sitting back and pretending they don't see the lies.

And there's the power of language. Anytime you speak in someone else's language other than your own, then the emphasis is where *they* want to put it.

That's why I get excited when I read a book like *Need I Say More* or *Hear My Soul's Voice*. There's the different spin on language. Do you know? There's a spin poverty places on language. There's a spin culture places on language. And that's why when you put it into the main society's hands, they don't know the rules of this language. So now they have to play with *our* deck.

Focus: And what happens?

Sharon: They reject it! Naturally, because they don't understand it; it's like looking at a foreign language. There are nuances they can't see. It becomes a debate now! Is this legitimate or isn't it? Black folks can't have African language anymore, they can't have street language either. They have to learn the dominant language. I know the dominant language, and I can see underneath the dominant language. But I still like to keep my hands in the street talk. To keep hold of something that's being created daily. Black English is a way of not having to let you know what I'm dealing with.

Writing from the Heart

Focus: You talked about a lot just now. You've been talking about the lies, you've been talking about sometimes taking the risk to say something different in your writing, sometimes deciding not to. What of this do you bring to your teaching of writing?

Sharon: I tell people to tell the truth. When I sit down with somebody and I'm going to teach them a writing skill, I say, "I'm not here to correct your paper. I'm not here to check the spelling. If it's true to you, write it down. It's important." Maybe they can't share it with anybody either. Maybe they shouldn't. But they should be able to look at it and know they thought that and felt that, and it was valuable, and it was the truth the way they saw it.

Focus: How about for you Zona?

Zona: Yep, I always tell people, I say, "Write down the way you want to write it." Because what they're talking about, someone else may have different words to use for that feeling. Like the tourist that goes through towns to see how poor people live, but they don't know how they live. They say, "I'm going to experience what these people have to experience. I'm leaving my checkbook and stuff home..."

Focus: For people who believe that they're bad writers, who believe that they can't spell and that's why they can't write, how do you help them do what you're both saying you encourage people to do when they write—speak the truth and write from the heart?

Zona: Well, one day I brought in "The Serpent and the Rainbow." This is a voodoo movie. I asked everybody when the movie was over, "What did you all think about the movie?" So we got on this dis-

cussion; we had discussion and writing. Some people were so excited they were writing the same day. And I had given it to them for homework. The day was over and everybody was still sitting. I said, "I'm going home." You never seen writing so quick.

Focus: Why?

Zona: It was something that they were *interested* in.

Sharon: I was doing an ESL workshop just the other night. And I said, How do you bridge certain things? I came up with an exercise where you pick a word out of a list — "home, family, sun, tree" — different types of things. Pick out a word that you felt like writing about. Write as much as you can in English. Any time English failed you, use your home language. So you've asked them to write all the English they know to explain something and then gave them the leeway to be comfortable when they hit a wall with it. So as I'm reading it, and here comes up this word, I would ask them to explain it. I gave them an example of how "Hello" and "How are you doing" would sound in the ghetto, and then I did the standard English translation. I did it from street talk. So the person would explain to me, and since I don't speak Creole, they have to use English again. So they have to *use* language. This woman had to tell me why she didn't use 'Haiti, my love'; it just sounded funny to her. But "mon cheri" sounded beautiful to her, and it did sound beautiful as she was talking about Haiti. And we do it in writing all the time.

Focus: What got them to write?

Sharon: The fact that I said this is yours. I'm not judging it. You can share it with me if you want to; you don't have to if you don't want to.

Focus: And Zona, how did you go from discussion to writing after the movie?

Zona: Everything worked for itself. I mean, as soon as the lights came on they was taking their papers out and everybody was writing. And you can't hardly get that class to write.

Focus: And these were people who would say to you before...

Zona: They'd say, "Oh boy, I'm sick of this. Why do we have to write?"

Sharon: That's what they were saying before when I first sat down in that ESL class.

Zona: But when you do something that's interesting, then you'll be surprised. It's just like when I was going to school, if it was something I wasn't interested in, I'd just blank out.

Moving Out

Focus: What are people writing about in your groups?

Sharon: We're trying to move the writing in a different direction this year. A lot of things have been very introspective, in a way. But discussions are ensuing now about outside issues. How that's going to translate into the writing that'll be in the magazine, I'm still not sure.

Focus: You say you're moving from introspection to...

Sharon: Out — looking at the world. Looking at what's going on. A couple of the women are writing about mental health care, a real issue for women in America. Especially poor women. The minute they can't cope, they're labelled crazy, given drugs, and have their children taken away.

Focus: How are you moving from the introspection?

Sharon: Conversation. See writing doesn't happen, for most of the women and for me, it doesn't happen like a watershed. It happens like, you talk about it, you start to think about it. You may not think of it connected to a piece. And then you get a little more information or you do a little more talking within the group. And someone else says this and you say that and by the time it's all over, you have an idea of something, and it starts to bother you and nag you and then it comes out in some form. It takes some shape. People play off each other, and they're stimulated or they're made mad or...When we get together there's some serious talking that goes on. It's all stimulus. That's why I like the group dynamic.

Zona: It's just like when we saw the movie. We got into this discussion, and this woman wrote all these things that her mother told her that had happened to people down south. So that made me tell some things that I had heard, and we were writing.

Sharon: You asked us why we teach writing. I think everybody deserves a voice. Every strata deserves a voice. I don't think anybody in the culture should have more of a voice than the next person. I really think it's important for progress. I think all the people we throw away, we haven't examined if they had any worth. People pan for gold dust, well there's people dust out there that has value, people who have minds, who have energy, who have ideas that we could be using. But we don't know they're there because we don't hear them, we threw them away. We just assumed they didn't know what was going on. How can you make those asumptions? That's what I want to say about it. I think they deserve to be published. That they should be published. And there are readers for it. Us poor folks who are literate need some literature that we can relate to. We deserve something.

Sharon (Howell) Cox
Jefferson Park Writing Center
6 Jefferson Park Apt. 52
Cambridge, MA 02140
617/497-0211

Zona Johnson
Jackson/Mann Community School
500 Cambridge Street
Allston, MA 02134
617/783-2770

Research Within Reach: Participatory Action Research and the Literacy Classroom

About a year ago students in our adult literacy program began to write and publish their autobiographies. Lydia was the first to finish with her story of growing up in Italy during World War II. She wrote of living in a cave, washing the dishes of the German soldiers, and finally of the journey to America. Shortly afterwards, Luther started to write his stories of growing up in Mississippi and the lessons he learned the time he ran away with the hobos. Then, in rapid succession Tiny began to put to paper what it was like to spend her childhood in institutions, Linda started to write about being in her first marriage and Lucy told about her roller-coaster year battling with child custody.

All of us, students and teachers alike, were amazed not just at the quantity of writing beginning readers could produce but at the depth of experience and the power contained in the writing. The writing had created for them a way to draw from their memories pictures of the struggles they had gone through in their lives: with finding and keeping jobs, trying to keep the family together; with poverty, illiteracy, racism and physical abuse. For many people writing was also an affirmation of their will and determination to make things better. "So life is tough, but we got to make the best," said Leandra. What a striking contrast these books were to many of the sterile, bland materials commercially produced for new readers!

After this group of writers published their books a new group of students joined us. When they read the first generation of books, these new students came to understand more fully the meaning of audience: writing could be more than self-expression; it could provide information and education to others. These writers expressed the desire to warn kids not to wind up in jail like they did, to tell mothers what it's like to have your child go through a drug rehabilitaiton clinic and make it. We all began to realize that the information people wrote about wasn't what you saw in the media or in literature written about the problem by someone else. There was something about the knowledge created from direct personal experience that was special. And this was even more true of the new literates in our classes whose first-hand opinions were seldom found in the public domain of literature.

We used what's called a writing process approach to generate the writing. At the same time we were reveling in its potential as a tool to teach literacy, my colleagues and I also felt a growing concern. Students were writing about the oppressive conditions in their lives, but what were we as a group doing to try to change them? Could the content of these writings serve as a channel for reflection and action on conditions in people's everyday lives? If so, how?

During this period I was also attending the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, a gathering place for nonformal educators from many countries. I learned that similar questions of links between education and action have haunted trainers in the Third World, who have watched development projects come and go while nothing in the daily lives of the people ever really changed. It was out of this context that a new research paradigm called participatory action research, originated. Shuttling back and forth between the university and my job in Springfield, I began to think about the potential usefulness of participatory action research in our own field. I wondered if partnerships could be developed between students, teachers and researchers in such a way that student writing could become a resource and knowledge base for understanding community problems and making change. I have only begun a process of looking for answers to these questions and hope the overview provided here may pique other teachers to explore the possibilities for participatory action research in their own literacy classrooms.

Participatory Action Research

People who engage in participatory action research see it as a process of joint inquiry between outside researchers, educators and local people — all of whom are subjects and learners. Decision making takes place as part of a dialogue between researchers, who may have technical research knowledge, and people who have experienced the problems being investigated. In contrast to traditional research, which may end when the researchers leave the community, participatory action research aims at educating community members so they can continue to work to overcome oppressive conditions in their lives.

Participatory action research is an alternative to traditional research methods in which the decisions about what to study are largely made outside the community, people are "research subjects", and knowledge about their lives is created and carried away by "experts". Budd Hall, one of the founders of the major international organization of participatory action researchers, the Participatory Research Group, points out that social science has become a commodity in control of those who can pay for the research. Specialists who are able to use a "scientific" style of writing and sophisticated technical knowledge become the gatekeepers of information which overshadows the exper-

ential knowledge of those being studied. Given this framework, ordinary people are rarely considered knowledgeable or capable of knowing about their own reality. We have created, Hall claims, a structure for the production of knowledge that makes it nearly impossible for ordinary people to contribute to the world's store of knowledge.

Colombian participatory action researcher Orlando Fals Borda emphasizes the way in which this control over the production of knowledge has deflected attention away from other forms of knowledge. For example, practical, subjective knowledge which people create by interacting with others, critical knowledge developed through self-reflection and dialogue. These latter forms of knowing, he asserts, can also be "scientifically" validated through community consensus and can help people to create commonly shared values. In his work in Colombia, Mexico and Nicaragua, he has encouraged the recovery and revalidation of popular knowledge that has been forgotten or discarded through publication of family and community histories; traditional music; myths and beliefs formerly transmitted orally; and other projects that recognize the role of local people in making their own history. The process of systematically collecting, writing and analyzing this new knowledge, he feels, should be seen as valid research and integral to effective community development.

Research and Action as Practice

The way in which participatory research techniques can be used to give local people a voice and to effect change can best be seen through actual examples. One such project took place in England. In 1985 two support groups of Afro-Caribbean young people formed through the Central Manchester Caribbean English Project to research problems faced by Afro-Caribbean youths. Their goal was to produce a book that would reflect their experience of life in British society and counterbalance the picture of black youth transmitted by the media. They wrote about what it was like to be a first generation immigrant, to investigate the African heritage they had never learned about in school and to talk about the meaning of the Rasta experience. The words of reggae singer Bob Marley, "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but yourself can free your mind" became a theme for the group as they uncovered layers of history that had previously been hidden. Their research and advocacy later were instrumental in lobbying the City Council to create a new community project for Afro-Caribbean people.

In Philadelphia, a literacy class at The Women's School identified AIDS as a topic to investigate while they worked on reading and writing skills. The women found the practical information in the existing literature often concealed difficult, underlying questions about personal relationships or sexism, like what a heterosexual woman could do if a man won't *use* a condom. They also found it left untouched political issues such as why there is no cure. Working together, they sought answers to these questions, published their own community pamphlet on AIDS and distributed it in neighborhood churches, pizza parlors and through a daily paper route.

Another example of participatory action research does not come from a literacy setting per se, but the people involved engaged in a kind of reading they never thought they were capable of before. Their story holds a lesson for literacy teachers about people's ability to surpass our sometimes too-limited expectations when the motivation is real.

In Bumpus Cove, Tennessee, people noticed that they got dizzy and their eyes watered every time a dump truck went through their town. A few people contacted the Department of Public Health. "They will do something," the people thought.

Time went on and nothing changed—except that more people got dizzy and more eyes began to water. Finally some people went to the Highlander Center, a community-based training and education center in Tennessee. After discussing the problem with participatory action researchers there, they decided to go up to the hill and read for themselves just what was on the labels of the canisters. They carefully copied down every word. When they got back to Highlander, their task was to look up the names in some very technical books. And they did. Motivation to find a solution to their problem became stronger than their previous inhibitions. Day after day they copied the lists of all the chemicals and compared them with symptoms experienced by townspeople. Finally, they took it to the Department of Public Health. "Who obtained this information?" the incredulous officials asked. "We did," they answered.

Eventually, but not without a struggle, the people were able to stop the dumping company from bringing toxic wastes into their town. An equally important outcome was that people had learned that once they identified a problem, they themselves could conduct research on it and take action.

The Literacy Classroom

As literacy teachers involved in helping students produce their own materials about their lives, we may be in a unique position to incorporate elements of participatory action research into our work. Projects common to adult literacy classrooms —autobiographies that tell about life in a community, letters of opinion or complaint to local officials, schools or hospitals, or a search for ways to access social services— all are the beginnings of research that might be taken a few steps further. For students, they may be a starting point for a process of coming to see themselves as experts, of valuing and validating their own subjective experiences and of using writing as a tool for collective analysis and action. Literacy research has shown us that reading and writing is a process of creating meaning. Participatory action research offers a framework for helping people to act on the meanings they create. Perhaps when someone like Leandra says, "So life is tough, but we got to make the best," we can employ this framework to ask, "How can we, together, make it better?"

Marilyn Gillispie
Read Write Now Adult Learning Center
Springfield City Library
200 Birnie Avenue
Springfield, MA 01107
(413) 788-8806

Materials That Matter:
Excerpts from Magazines and Literacy Publications

Telly Addict

Dynasty Dallas, all you sit and watch
What them getting paid for, you all never got
The rich getting richer, the poor getting
poorer,
Joan Collins live in luxury and everyone
adore her.
Tick tock, tick tock minutes going past,
Get up, get up children and learn very fast.

Deborah Boyce
Not All Roses: Poetry and Prose by the Black Anthology Group

On A Beano

When you go into a factory
you meet genuine people
who've seen hardship like yourself.
There can be great laughs
and great rows
but they are good people.
And you go on your beanos —
your days out.

You all put
a few bob together
over so many months,
then hire a coach
and go off down to Southend.
You stop at a halfway house,
all get a bit drunk
and have a knees up.

Then you carry on down
to Southend
and see the lights.

You all go to the pub,
and when it closes
you have fish and chips.

To me Beanos are fantastic,
out with your hats and streamers
and the blokes are so blind drunk
they've lost their memories.
Someone comes along
and they'll pick someone up
and put him on the coach
even though they don't know him from
Adam.

That's factory people
and that is life to me.
You all have a great time.
It's how I want my kids to be
when they grow up.

Annie Spike
A Woman's Work...

Harrassment

One evening me a com from wok,
And a run fe ketch de bus,
Two police start fe run me dung,
Just fe show how me no have no luck,
Dem ketch me and start to mek a fus,
Say a long time dem a watch how me,
A heng, heng round de shop.

Me say me? What? heng round shop?
From morning me da a wok,
Me only jus stop,
An if onoo tink a lie ma a tell,
Go an go ask de manager.

Dem insisted I was a potential tief,
And teck me to de station,
Anyway dem sen and call me relations,
Wen dem com it was a big relief,
Fe se som one me own color,
At least who woulda talk and laugh wid me.

An me still lock up in a jail,
So till me people dem insist dat
Dem go a me wok to get som proof,
The police man dem nearly hit the roof,
Because dem feel dem was so sure,
That it is me dem did have dem eyes on,
Boy, I don't know what's rong,
With this babylon man.

Dem can't tell one black man from de other
one.

Perhaps the real achievement of (this movement) lies in the fact that, over and above making a reality of working class culture, it redefines the 'political' in terms of the struggle of individuals to recapture the right to articulate their own situation.

Mike Poole
Time Out Magazine, London

Anyway, when we reach me wok place,
Straight away de manager recognise me face,
And we go check me card fe se me dis clock
out.
So me gather strengh and say to de coppers,
Leggo me onoo don't know wey onoo on
about.
You want fe se dem face sa dem a apologise,
But when me look pon how
Me nearly face disgrace,
it mek me want fe kus and fight,
But wey de need, in a babylon sight,
If you right you rong,
And when you rong you double rong.

So me a beg onoo teck heed,
Always have a good afeby,
Because even though you innocent,
Someone always a try,
Fe mek you bid freedom goodbye.

Fred Williams
The Republic Of Letters

The Recliner

Arthritis in the back of the neck
makes my father
look at his chair —
a yellow squat
that cuffs his shoulders.
He mumbles something to Mary
who mentions it to Joan,
I get in over the phone
and someone tells Karl.
All his motherless children
who want to keep forever their father.
A recliner, someone says, and we
drive Pap to the Lazy-Boy store.

Joan picks it up to save $10,
and already he is inside the new glove
content as a bug in a sunflower.
"I don't deserve it,"
he says happily,
remembering no other chair that mattered.
The chairs that kept him from us,
in a row, a parade of years
of exhaustion or indifference.
All the tired Saturday mornings
and evenings in a kitchen chair
or the old blue horsehair.

The rest then
of the provider,
the butter-and-eggs truck driver,
harnessed to the silent spot beside
the radiator.
At last his feet tingle
the feet of a man
rocking in his basket of gold
in his little room
with the patchwork comfort.

The chairs that kept him from us
and us from him
are gone
taken away by time and death.
This is the chair, Father.
Too much seeing you inside it,
your surprise, your surprise
that we would buy it,
our reminder
that one recliner
can cradle, like Noah's Ark,
the world.

Carol Montgomery
Mill Hunk Herald

Everything Changes

in '41 there were three women bolt cutters
at the Milwaukee Road machine shops
in the Menomonee River Valley
underneath the 35th street viaduct

there was a womens bathroom in the wheel shop
for the bolt cutters
one in the back shop for the laborer
that cleaned the offices
and another in the warehouse
for the female clerks

then World War two ended
and the men that were left alive
came home to the women in the factories
being swept away with the last shift's steel chips
and their bathrooms were converted to store rooms
and mens locker space (Black segregated from White,
of course)

and the women went home to have the babies that died in
the Korean War

then in 1978
thanks to the Civil Rights and womens movements
(and a fire of unexplained origin
that burned down the Black locker building in the 60's)
the segregated lockers had been integrated
two female welders
one machinist helper
one laborer
one machine apprentice
and one machinist
were hired
to work with the 600 male employees in the Valley
with one less toilet for the women to pee in
than their sisters had in the '40's

now in '85
after bankruptcy reorganization
broken promises lies and lay-offs
there are two factory women left at the "road"
the laborer that survived the second world war
and me
both of us sharing a bathroom with two foremen
one male clerk and what ever men walk in and out of the office
proving once again that progress
is not the same
as revolution

Susan Doro
Mill Hunk Herald

Haiti

Last year I told you about Christmas in Haiti. This year, I can't tell you about it, because they are too angry to celebrate Christmas. I am going to tell you about my situation and the Haitian situation. So many people don't understand Haiti. They think the wrong things about it.

I fail here. Everywhere I turn is discrimination. They don't like my color, but they like to exploit my health and my blood.

Haiti possesses more resources than other countries, for example: aluminum, petrol, soap-mines, and essential oil. The U.S.A. collaborates with the Government and the merchants to exploit Haiti. The U.S.A. has millions of dollars of benefits from Haiti every day. I am sorry, Haiti is not for sale. The U.S. Government said they would help Haiti. What kind of help? Arms to kill people? Everyone human knows this isn't the right kind of help.

Remember, Haiti is the first black nation to have liberty. Remember again, Haitian people are strong. That's why we struggle with courage for a new Haiti.

Haiti, I can't forget you. If I forget you, I forget my mother too.

SWEETHEART, I LOVE YOU.

Marie Lucie Meritus
Hear My Soul's Voice
Volume VII

"I wish there was a way to show the way we really are—to our communities and ourselves."—*Ana Martinez, South Boston High*
*Photo: Tammy Lambright/*Mosaic

Publications Quoted

A Woman's Work... and
Not All Roses: Poetry and Prose by the Black Anthology Group
Centerprise
136 Kingsland High Street
Hackney, London
E8 2NS England

Hear My Soul's Voice
Jefferson Park Writing Center
6 Jefferson Park Apt. 52
Cambridge, MA 02140
$5.00 an issue, including postage

Mill Hunk Herald
916 Middle Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15212
$5.00 a year

For a listing of other British programs that produce and distribute writings:
Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers
35 Nursery Road
London SW9 8BS
England

For a listing of Canadian programs that produce and distribute writings:
Rachel Martin
World Education
210 Lincoln Street
Boston, MA 02111

To order issues of Mosaic:
Mosiac
95 G Street
South Boston, MA 02127
$3.00 an issue. Add $2.00 postage for one to four magazines, $3.50 for five to ten.

BLACKBOARD

Funding Your Publication

Libraries

The Federal Government makes monies available to libraries for literacy programs. Shelley Quezada of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners reports that the first instinct of libraries is to use these funds to acquire materials for their collection. The catch is that few existing materials are of good quality. Quezada urges libraries to publish the writings of adult literacy participants and make these available for circulation. Library monies can only pay for the printing of materials that will be distributed free. Having used the library funds as seed money, however, programs can then more easily look for other funds with which to reprint the materials and distribute them in other ways.

For information about adult literacy projects that have used library funds to publish participants' writings, contact:

Publishing for Literacy
Adult Literacy Resource Institute
241 St. Botolph Street
Boston, MA 02115
617/424-7947

Paula Baker
Rutland Free Library
10 Court Street
Rutland, VT 05701
802/773-1860

Other Sources

When searching for sources of funds to publish student writing or to support a writing workshop, Michael Tierney, founder of the student-written magazine *Mosaic*, suggests looking beyond the typical literacy channels. Outside the constellation of funders interested in education lies the larger universe of support for both projects in the arts and humanities as well as projects that address a particular social issue. This can range from local businesses that provide in-kind printing to corporations with a plant in the local community to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Foundations concerned with a particular issue, such as health care or unemployment, might fund the publication of writings that address that issue. Another tack used by *Mosaic* was the establishment of teaching positions for artists-in-residence, which were then funded through the state arts council.

For information about NEH state chapters:

Division of State Programs
National Endowment for the Humanities
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20506
202/786-0254

For information about state arts councils:

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
Suite 201 12-0 19th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202/296-4662

Tips on Distribution

Approaching Bookstores

Katie Singer, editor of *Mosaic*, takes the magazine to bookstores to show it to store managers in person. Several bookstores have carried *Mosaic*, and B. Dalton did a window display with it. The typical commission arrangement gives 60% of the sales price to *Mosaic* and 40% to the bookstore.

Listing in *Books in Print*

Books In Print is an annual publication listing all in-print and forthcoming titles from more than 25,000 publishers. These are the thick, red volumes, categorized by "Authors", "Titles", and "Publishers" seen in every bookstore and library. *Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory* performs the same function for magazines and newsletters.

Neither of these directories ensures the distribution of publications, but they are the principal information sources for those interested in ordering titles. Listings are free of charge. Both directories are published by R.R. Bowker.

For forms and further information, write to either Books In Print, *Advance Book Information Department or* Ulrich's, *Managing Editor at the address below:*

R.R. Bowker
245 West 17th Street
New York, New York 10011
212/337-6971

Words Walking

This year, a publication called *Words Walking: A Gathering of Community Stories*, makes its debut. Each issue will highlight the literature of a particular people, such as the differently abled, people affected by AIDS, young people within the child welfare system, or participatory action research groups. One of the issues will focus on the writings of participants in adult literacy programs. The newsletter is an attempt to circulate written stories between people in small, grassroots groups, and review and encourage the development of other projects.

Write:

Michael Tierney
659 Big Ugly Creek Road
Leet, West Virginia 25536

Reviews in Community Publications

Local women's and neighborhood newspapers are often seeking reviews of innovative materials. Contact those in your community to find out about deadlines and length specifications.

For an example of a women's newspaper that has a review column, write:

Sojourner
380 Green Street
Cambridge, MA 02139

Announcements

Send flyers announcing your publication to your local libraries. If the writings in the publication center around a particular theme, send flyers to national and community organizations that address that issue.

Focus on Basics
World Education
210 Lincoln St.
Boston, MA 02111

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR
1990

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Boston, MA
Permit No. 50157